

Leesburg Mining District
Napias and Moose Creek
Salmon vicinity
Lemhi County
Idaho

HAER No. ID-25

HAER

ID

30-SALV

42

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
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San Francisco, California 94107

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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Leesburg Mining District

HAER No. ID-25

Location: The Leesburg Mining District lies within the Napias and Moose creek drainages in western Lemhi County, Idaho. Its eastern edge is located about 6 miles west of Salmon, the county seat.

Quads: Cobalt, 1989 (provisional), 7.5'
Gant Mountain, 1989 (provisional), 7.5'
Jureano Mountain, 1989 (provisional), 7.5'
Leesburg, 1989 (provisional), 7.5'
Napolean Hill, 1991 (provisional), 7.5'
Pine Creek Ridge, 1991 (provisional), 7.5'

UTM: A: Zone 11, 723000 E, 5028000 N
B: Zone 11, 734500 E, 5013500 N
C: Zone 11, 725000 E, 5000500 N
D: Zone 11, 715000 E, 5012500 N

**Dates of
Construction:** 1866-1942

Present Owner: Salmon National Forest, Salmon, Idaho
Meridian Gold Company, Salmon, Idaho
and others

Present Use: Recreation, logging, and mining

Significance: The Leesburg Mining District is one of the earliest gold mining areas in Idaho. It was established in 1866 during the placer mining boom. The area has continued to be mined, if sporadically, by small-time placer and lode mine operators since that time. The small community of Leesburg served the district's commercial and social center until World War II.

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Butte, Montana

December 1992

HISTORY

A. OVERVIEW OF THE LEESBURG MINING DISTRICT

The Leesburg Basin is located in the Salmon River Mountains in Lemhi County, east-central Idaho, and encompasses the drainage basin of Napias Creek and its tributaries. The Leesburg Mining District, later known as the Mackinaw District, includes the entire Leesburg Basin plus the Moose Creek drainage, which begins immediately northeast of Napias Creek. The town of Leesburg was established in this area in 1866 with the first discovery of gold. After the initial boom in the late 1860s, its population quickly declined and continued to do so, gradually, into the twentieth century. Leesburg ceased to function as a community at the beginning of World War II.

The first gold strike in the Leesburg area was made by . . . five men--F.B. Sharkey (the leader), Elijah Mulkey, Joseph Rapp, William Smith, and Ward Girton--[who] left Deer Lodge, Montana, in the early summer of 1866 and traveled west to the Salmon River, then turned upriver to the mouth of the Lemhi River where they encountered McGarvey [a miner who settled at the confluence of the two rivers where he constructed fish traps]¹ Proceeding southward along the Salmon River for a few miles, they then turned westwardly, following an Indian trail up Williams Creek and camped near its headwaters. At this point, they turned north along a divide then dropped into the lower country of Moccasin Creek where they found a little gold, but they continued northward to a creek in the upper Leesburg Basin. An Indian acquaintance back at Deer Lodge had told them there was gold here worth a lot of "napias," the Shoshoni word for money. Working the placers, they indeed found substantial amounts of gold on August 12, 1866. They appropriately named the creek Napias and their strike site Discovery Bar. Each man staked a claim at this locale, and one of the miners left for Deer Lodge to buy supplies for the winter and to tell only their close friends of the strike.² . . .

News of the strike soon leaked out, and a stampede to upper Napias Creek was quickly under way. Many of these new miners left their unproductive claims at Florence and Bannack to join the rush. A number of claims were made, and work began before the arrival of winter. Soon, a mining camp and district, both named Leesburg (after the Confederate General Robert E. Lee), were created, and five stores, three butcher shops, and a blacksmith shop were established. That fall, 26 houses were constructed, and a mail route to Bannack began. A few thousand prospectors/miners were scattered over the Basin by the end of 1866. To supply the new settlement and surrounding area, pack train services began from northern Utah, southern Idaho, and southwestern Montana. At the confluence of the Lemhi and Salmon Rivers, 18 miles south/southwest of Leesburg, another settlement began to take shape as a redistribution center for the Basin. It was soon named Salmon City, and within two years, became the county seat of the new county of Lemhi.³

At Leesburg, following the initial strike in August 1866, some 3,000 claims (many more than miners) were recorded by the first fall, and 400-500 miners spent the winter there. According to one observer, "the gold was coarse and assayed high at \$18.40" and some of the claims that fall paid \$8 to \$20 a day, "and in a few instances, much more."⁴

Mining and building at Leesburg continued with some Union sympathizers constructing their homes and stores on the east end of Main Street and naming their section Grantsville. This name was dropped early in 1867 when it officially became part of Leesburg.⁵ Before closing down operations in December, when the streams froze and a winter of heavy snowfall began, some miners were recovering \$12 to \$16 a day according to another source.⁶ . . .

By early 1867, an estimated 3,000 to 7,000 persons were in the Basin. These men, and a few women, were drawn by several overly optimistic newspaper accounts of the recent and expected gold production for the season of 1867. Over the winter of 1866-67, these new residents experienced extremely cold temperatures and deep snows which greatly limited the amount of incoming supplies, especially food. In late winter, some Leesburg miners and storekeepers had shoveled out a trail to Salmon so food could be packed in on snowshoes or animal-drawn sleds. This trail became a toll pack-trail, which proved profitable for packers over the coming year. Some overly optimistic suppliers packed too much food and other goods, glutting the market and sending prices downward.⁷

A Montana Post reporter wrote the following description of Leesburg-Grantsville in May 1867.

... I found myself at Leesburg and Grantsville. The two, or rather one mining town, built on a plateau similar to Virginia City, but surrounded on all sides by dense timber. But one street, running north and south [sic], indicates both towns, and the stranger on entering never would imagine the existence of two, unless told to. Throughout these burghs building is carried on extensively. The most notable feature is the substantiality and beauty of construction of their buildings, especially when considering that lumber, all cut by hand, is 25 cents per foot, and every log has been hauled by hand also, no animals being in the mines all winter. The supplies were packed in during the winter, and are still transported on pack animals, some 300 head having been in service. Leesburg, or the lower town, is ahead of its sister in point of building and business, lots commanding in this section an enormous price. One corner lot, considered one of the best, changed hands on the night of my arrival for \$3,000 in gold, with only a rough log house improvement on it. About 130 buildings in every stage of

construction, now comprise the towns, but ere this reaches you probably twice that number will be up and occupied.⁸

With winter over, construction on new and previously uncompleted buildings began in March. New miners and businessmen continued to arrive at Leesburg and the Basin. This influx appears to have been offset by discouraged miners who were leaving, the population stabilizing at approximately 2,000 persons in the spring of 1867. Like miners at other boom/bust mining communities, these men lacked the capital or social motivation to remain at a location for very long if no profit were to be made. More would have left if the price of food and other commodities had remained high instead of dropping so low that some could afford to make a new start when the mining season arrived.⁹

In the spring of 1867, following the burst of building and mining activity at Leesburg, three men moved about two miles up Napias Creek near the mouth of Smith's Gulch. These individuals, John L. Morgan, Charles Chamberlain, and Gerome Pratt, constructed several log houses and a larger building which became a store stocked with miner's supplies and probably food. A blacksmith shop, restaurant, and other businesses were established here as well. A saw pit was dug, and whip-sawed lumber, used in construction of the above buildings, was produced.¹⁰

Weather was again a factor for Leesburg's mines, as the melting spring snow resulted in the flooding and destruction of mining equipment and operations. There was also a surplus of miners

In addition to the abundant snow-melt runoff, the miners were hampered by large rocks and boulders in the placer deposits. Gold production for the season was a disappointing [\$250,000].¹¹

However, the prediction for higher gold yields the following year proved true, and gold production in 1868 was three times that of the year before.¹² Some men who did not locate placer gold deposits in the area turned to cattle raising and farming in the Lemhi and Salmon Valleys, others started a business or worked for someone in Salmon City. As a sister city of Leesburg, Salmon City experienced a simultaneous "boom." . . . Among the bustling and rapidly increasing population of Salmon were Chinese and Shoshoni or Bannock Indians who performed odd jobs. Some of the Chinese eventually opened stores or restaurants in town or moved out to Leesburg to mine.¹³

Some miners held on at Leesburg into the 1870s. The 1870 population was 174, including 43 Chinese who were working their placer claims or working for others who had a claim. The best producing claims at the time were at California Bar where Sharkey and his associates produced an average of \$30,000 a week during the mining

season. Two other placer locations, Beartrack and Rapp creeks, also yielded relatively profitable amounts of gold.¹⁴

As many of the Anglo-American miners gave up and left Leesburg, Chinese miners moved in to work the developed claims and spoil banks. Being more frugal and having lower expectations in terms of yield, the Chinese population grew and prospered. Some wanted to save enough money to make them wealthy when they returned to China, while others remained at Leesburg or Salmon City in spite of the hardships they experienced due to the widespread prejudice of the times. By 1880, the Leesburg area had a population of 181 Chinese, 210 Anglo-Americans, two Hispanic Americans, and one Native American.¹⁵ . . .

The discovery and development of lode claims during the 1880s provided employment for some miners, although lode mining was never as profitable as placering in and around Leesburg. Some of the lode mining and milling was financed by investors and companies outside the district. For instance, the Leesburg Milling and Mining Company was organized in Boston to develop gold quartz claims in the Leesburg area. A Salt Lake City corporation, the Bitter Root Mining and Milling Company, assumed control of the Italian Gold Mining Company in 1897, five years after the Italian Mine had been discovered. In 1897, another "outside" entity, the Pacific Dredge Company, began working placers on Moose Creek, located north of the town of Leesburg. Over the next 20 years, this operation produced over \$1 million in placer gold.¹⁶

The survival of Leesburg as a productive gold area into the early twentieth century was due to these outside investments and to the efforts of O.E. Kirkpatrick, who took over operation of the Gold Dust Mine [in Wards Gulch] in 1898. He was Leesburg's champion booster from the time he arrived in 1896 until the late 1930s. Kirkpatrick became proficient in all aspects of mining and milling, and he served as mining recorder for the Leesburg District for a number of years.¹⁷ . . .

Lode, as well as some placer mining, continued in and around Leesburg into the early 1900s. One significant location of placer mining was near the Haidee Mine where an arkosic mantle formed each winter by the disintegration of granite bearing placer gold.¹⁸ Production was small, however, especially after the relatively good years of 1901-1902. By 1920, the recovery of placer gold had reached an all-time low at Leesburg.¹⁹ In 1908, the Haidee was operating near the head of Arnett Creek, and a second mine, the Brigham property, was located just below the Italian Mine on the same stream. Except for the latter, these underground mines and others in the Basin did not produce the predicted amounts of gold and silver. The Italian produced about \$175,000 during this period. This figure constituted more than half of the total Leesburg Basin production of lode mines up to 1912.²⁰

The 1900 population at Leesburg was 126 Anglo and 31 Chinese. By 1910, these figures had dropped to 72 and 3, respectively. This decrease correlated with the decline in gold production. Only a small number of the several hundred houses and commercial buildings, built mainly between 1866 and the 1870s, survived into the early twentieth century.²¹

Leesburg experienced a modest financial recovery in the 1920s in spite of low gold prices. In 1927 and 1928, [Bonanza Placer, Inc.] and H.F. Byram initiated relatively large placer operations in the Napias and Moose creek areas. [Smaller claims were mined using hydraulic giants as early as 1917 and into the 1930s.] . . . Most productive [placer mines] were on Arnett Creek, Moose Creek, and Napias Creek, while previously unworked areas on Daly Creek, Beartrack Gulch, Wright's Gulch, Ward's Gulch, Smith's Creek, Sawpit Creek, and Rapp's Creek were worked profitably in the late 1930s. The 1930 population of Leesburg was 30.²²

The Gold Dust Mine continued production at its average rate, and placer mining on Napias Creek produced a fair amount of gold and silver up until 1934. Lode mining for gold essentially ceased during the 1930s, and placer mining in the 1940s showed a sharp decrease in production. . . .²³

When compared with other gold mining areas of central Idaho, Leesburg ranks neither among the most nor the least productive. With an estimated early-day production of \$5 million, Leesburg did not even approach the riches of the Boise Basin, where \$3 million in gold was taken out in the year 1870 alone, or Florence, where an estimated \$6 million-worth was recovered in 1862. Boise Basin had produced \$40 million in gold from both placer and lode mines by 1869, and Florence an impressive \$80 million in placer gold in the late 1800s.²⁴

In many respects, the early history of the Leesburg Basin and its production instead resembles that of Pierce, the site of the first discovery of gold in Idaho. The summer following the discovery, \$60,000 in gold was recovered each week and as many as 1500 people lived in Oro Fino City, the district's supply point. By the fall, gold was discovered at Florence and most of the miners left Oro Fino City, never to return. Chinese miners quickly assumed operation of the abandoned placer claims. An estimated \$10 million in placer gold was produced in the Pierce City District, but only \$¼ million in lode gold.²⁵

B. MINING TECHNOLOGY

As the above discussion indicates, mining in the Leesburg Mining District did not follow the progression of mining techniques that many districts in the West experienced. Generally, a gold-bearing deposit was discovered in a placer deposit which was initially

worked by hand. If abundant gold was present, mechanical placering, using hydraulic and later dredging equipment, quickly followed. At approximately the same time, lode deposits were discovered by following the placer deposit to its source. Lode mining soon replaced placering, because the deposits usually contained more gold than the placer ground and capitalists were more willing to invest in lode mines than in placering operations.

Mining in the Leesburg Basin did not progress according to this idealized pattern; and techniques, such as hydraulic placering, that were abandoned early at many gold camps continued to be used throughout the historic period. Because placer mining was historically the most profitable type of mining in the Leesburg area, a wide range of techniques were employed over the years. On the other hand, hardrock mining, accounting for a small percentage of all production in the Leesburg district, was undertaken on a small scale and involved only a few of a wide range of available techniques and equipment.

Placer Mining Techniques Used in the Leesburg Mining District

Miners in the Leesburg Mining District used several techniques during the historic period to extract gold from the placer deposits, including sluicing, drifting, hydraulicking, dredging, and draglines. While the earliest placer mining involved the use of rockers, long toms, and sluices, all but the latter were soon replaced by drift and hydraulic mining. By the turn of the century, sluices, hydraulic giants, and dredges were most commonly used. The latter three continued to be used sporadically until World War II.

Prospecting in the Leesburg Basin in 1866 presumably involved the use of pans, rockers, and long toms, but, as claims were located, this equipment was all but abandoned. To profitably work their claims, miners needed to move more material than was possible with these tools. Sluicing was the most commonly used technique during Leesburg's boom in the late 1860s. It involved the use of water run over a set of riffles which allowed the heavy gold to fall into the sluice and therefore be recovered. Two types of sluices were used, wooden and ground. Wooden sluices, made of lumber, were probably the most common of the two types. However, at least two ground or bedrock sluices were built.²⁶ In such sluices, water was run over bedrock and the clean-up was accomplished by removing the rock at the base of the sluice, under and around which the gold had settled.

Many claims were worked by drift mining through the end of the nineteenth century. Using this method, miners excavated a shaft or adit to the gold-bearing alluvial deposit, transported the material to the surface, and then sluiced it to recover the gold.²⁷

Several placer mining companies operated in the Leesburg Basin during the 1860s and 1870s, but they appear to have been small groups of miners with minimal capital investment in their enterprises. No sources identify investments by outside capitalists. The Discovery Company, Jackson and Company, Heath & Company Flume (later known as Napias Falls Fluming Company), Lemon & Company, the French (or French Placer) Company, and Pope, More and Company were all involved in the construction of long ditches and/or sluices for placer mining.²⁸

Although hydraulic giants had been used in Idaho as early as 1863,²⁹ there are no clear accounts of hydraulicking at Leesburg until the early 1870s, and then few specifics are available. Leesburg historian O.E. Kirkpatrick wrote that James Hockensmith, an early Leesburg miner who moved to the Lemhi River Valley to ranch after the easy gold was depleted, held claims on upper Arnett Creek which he hydraulic mined in the summers between 1871 and 1915. Kirkpatrick also mentioned that David McNutt hydraulicked Moose Creek prior to selling his property to the Pacific Dredging Company in the late 1890s. Of McNutt's operation, he wrote that it was "equipped . . . with ditches, pipe lines, flumes and reservoirs for hydraulic mining on a large scale."³⁰ According to the Engineering and Mining Journal, McNutt recovered \$1 million in gold.³¹

While sluice and hydraulic mining continued into the 1930s, it was the dredge on Moose Creek, installed in 1898, that produced the most placer gold in the early twentieth century. The Bucyrus dredge, with a 5000 cubic yard per day capacity,³² operated until 1901 when the boiler exploded. It was replaced with a smaller Bucyrus dredge which operated until 1904 and from 1906 or 1907 until 1919. An estimated \$1 million of gold was recovered during the 20 years of operation. A third dredge operated briefly on Moose Creek in the early 1940s when Fisher and Higgins leased Mullan's placer ground and moved a used 3000 cubic yard capacity dredge to the property. No production records are available.³³ Dredges were apparently not used more extensively in the Leesburg area, even though they could move more cubic yards of material per day than hydraulic mining operations, because of the small size of placer deposits with proven yardage.³⁴

The technologies employed at sluicing and hydraulic mining operations between 1900 and World War II were presumably very similar to those of the previous century. However, water delivery systems may have been more sophisticated for the latter operations, or at least for those which were run by companies with outside investors. For example, considering the amount of money spent to get the entire placering operation going (\$40,000), the system of ditches and dams constructed by Bonanza Placers, Inc. on Swamp Gulch and Rapp Creek in the late 1920s was likely more complicated than the late 1800s versions used by Hockensmith and McNutt.³⁵

Contemporary accounts of placer mining in the Leesburg Basin during the 1920s and 1930s note a significant amount of hand-placering, i.e., hand shoveling into a sluice box.³⁶ Merrill, Henderson, and Kiessling, in a critical review of the productivity of small-scale placer mines in the American West and particularly California, noted that miners of that era occasionally used gasoline-powered engines as part of their operations,³⁷ but there is no direct evidence for such in the Leesburg Basin except at the dragline operations.

Dragline operations between the mid-1920s and World War II usually consisted of the dragline, occasionally a shovel, a caterpillar or bulldozer (used to remove the overburden), and a washing plant. Those in the Leesburg Basin included one on Camp Creek just northwest of Leesburg and another on the Richardson/Shoup placers.³⁸

In summary, the chronology of placer mining in the Leesburg area shows that there was no clean progression of placering techniques over time. Sluicing continued to some extent throughout the history of the district. Hydraulic and dredge mining were conducted simultaneously, if sporadically, between the late nineteenth century and 1920, due primarily to the size of paying placer deposits and the available capital. In the 1920s and 1930s, hydraulic, dragline, and sluice mining were all undertaken, with no clear preference for any of the three methods. Dredging made a brief re-appearance in 1940 before all gold mining operations were closed down during World War II.

Lode Mining In the Leesburg Basin

The search for gold ore deposits in the Leesburg Basin began shortly after placer gold was discovered, but the transition to exclusive lode mining which many Western mining districts experienced was never made. The low grade of the material made lode mining unprofitable, with perhaps one or two exceptions.

Lode deposits were located within a few years of the discovery of placer gold at Leesburg.³⁹ However, it wasn't until the 1880s and 1890s that development of lode claims began in earnest. In most instances, this development waited the infusion of money from outside investors. Companies such as the Leesburg Milling and Mining Company (1882), the Idaho Gold Mining and Milling Company (1889), the Italian Mining Company (1892), and the Gold Dust Mining Company (1896) developed underground mines by constructing shafts and tunnels and often built small stamp mills, consisting of about 10 stamps each.⁴⁰

In the early twentieth century, a few mills were upgraded. The mill at the Italian Mine was enlarged to 30 stamps and powered by a hydroelectric plant using water drawn from Panther Creek. Ten-stamp mills and cyanide plants were installed at the Gold Dust and at the Gold Ridge.⁴¹ However, after the middle 1930s there was almost no active

underground gold mining in the Leesburg District.⁴² Only a handful of the lode claims were patented and the total estimated production from this type of mine is \$250,000.⁴³

C. LEESBURG SOCIETY

Unlike its mining history, Leesburg's social and economic history is fairly typical of small mining communities in Idaho and elsewhere in the American West. The initial boom filled the town with a large number of hopeful young men who soon left after all the easily accessible gold was recovered. During the late nineteenth century, small placer mining companies and the rare, capitalized lode mining companies offered moderate to slightly low wages to laborers who remained in the Leesburg Basin. From the late 1860s to the turn of the century, Chinese placer miners played a significant role in the area's history, operating claims which had been abandoned by earlier miners. The population during this time continued to be dominated by men. The number of residents in the Leesburg Basin declined during the twentieth century, although small placer and lode mining operations operated sporadically. A renewed interest in the district during the 1920s and 1930s apparently led to a temporary and modest increase in the number of residents, and families seemed to have comprised a larger proportion of the household groups than they had previously. The halt to gold mining during World War II turned Leesburg into a true ghost town. Recreational and commercial gold mining parties occasionally re-occupied the townsite after the war, but rarely if ever year-round or for more than a few years at a time.

Leesburg Gold Rush to 1869

The miners who traveled to Leesburg during the late 1860s were mostly young men, often with a military background, who had very little mining experience but no small amount of optimism.⁴⁴ The first to arrive worked independently or with a partner or two, locating claims on available ground. As the ground was quickly taken up and as profitable mining required coordinated efforts, some of the men hired on as laborers for one of several placer mining companies that formed. Laborers dug ditches, built sluices, and mined gold for the companies. A handful of placer miners were able to continue working for themselves. Most others, finding no good claims available and rejecting the idea of working for another, left Leesburg for new placer gold fields which continued to be discovered throughout the nineteenth century.

In 1866 and 1867, Leesburg became a small but active business community. In addition to the businesses that operated in town, such as saloons, butcher shops, blacksmith shops, and general stores, entrepreneurs operated freight lines between the new town and several supply points including Bannack and Virginia City, Montana; Salt Lake City, Utah; Walla Walla, Washington; and Boise and Salmon, Idaho.⁴⁵ Passenger service via stage began in the spring of 1867, continuing well into the twentieth

century.⁴⁶ Contemporary accounts indicate that most or all of these enterprises were operated by men. Women at Leesburg were few in number, at least some of those being involved in prostitution.⁴⁷

Winters in Leesburg were long, beginning in about October when sources of water for sluicing had dried up or frozen and continuing until April or later. During this time of year, some prospecting, ditch digging, and building construction continued in the basin.⁴⁸ The first winter was especially hard on Leesburg residents and would-be residents because of heavy and late snowfall. Those living in the basin suffered from extremely high prices for food and supplies, food shortages, and the lack of local medical attention,⁴⁹ and those who tried to travel into the area were often hampered by the heavy snow and extreme cold conditions.⁵⁰ As examples of the high prices paid for supplies, merchants in Leesburg were asking \$7 for a shovel, \$8 per gallon of coal oil, and \$28 per box of candles, while these same three items cost \$1.80 for two, \$2.25 per 5 gallons, and \$6.35, respectively, in Salmon the following September.⁵¹

As spring approached that first year in Leesburg, food supplies improved and the price of goods dropped, but housing costs remained high until about 1869 when many miners left for newly discovered gold fields elsewhere in central Idaho. Log houses sold for as high as \$3000 during the boom. Beds and meals at the boarding houses seem to have been more reasonably priced than other goods and services. One source reported rooms available for \$15 per week and meals for \$1 each at boarding houses.⁵²

One wonders, with these prices, how a miner could survive in Leesburg for long. Idaho historian Merle Wells reported that in 1867 claims were paying \$12-16 per day, a rate which would have allowed three to four partners to survive, if not prosper. Laborers for some of the small placer mining companies fared well, receiving \$42 per week.⁵³ Companies probably paid the high wages to keep men on the job, instead of prospecting on their own.

Just as the boom was beginning, Leesburg miners met to create the Leesburg Mining District and establish rules for locating and maintaining claims there. (The district covered roughly 325 square miles, with the community of Leesburg at the approximate center.) The initial meetings, held in August of 1866, identified the boundaries of the district; the types, size, and number of claims allowed; the proper disposal of tailings; and the amount of work which was required to be expended to keep claims and when that work was to be done. Subsequent meetings functioned to settle disputes between miners and fine-tune regulations.⁵⁴

While families were uncommon at Leesburg during the boom years, apparently a handful of children did live in the basin. A school was operated in town between 1868 and the 1870s.⁵⁵

Other social activities in town included a lodge of the International Order of Odd Fellows, which organized in the late 1860s. And Leesburg was granted a post office in June of 1869. As happened in many small towns across the West, the post office also served as a social center.⁵⁶

Leesburg from 1870 to about 1900

While most of the 7000 miners and their followers who moved to the Leesburg Basin in 1866 and 1867 left by 1870 to find their fortunes elsewhere, a good-sized community of 174 remained. The median age was about 30 and men comprised 96% of the population. These figures are likely similar to the age and gender numbers of the initial boom. However, the ethnic composition of the 1870 Leesburg Basin residents differed significantly from that of the gold rush prospectors. Twenty-five percent of the residents were Chinese miners.

Some of the small placer mining companies which formed in the previous decade continued to operate into the 1870s, but increasingly the placer claims were left to small companies of Chinese miners. This phenomenon was typical of busted placer mining areas of the American West. Chinese workers, apparently more frugal, hard-working, and patient than the miners who came before them, were able to recover enough gold to warrant an extended stay in the Leesburg Basin.

The Chinese miners lives and attitudes were different from those of their Euro-American neighbors in a number of ways. Concerning their rights and ownership of mining claims, Chinese nationals living in Idaho apparently could own property, but Lemhi County records show that rarely did they file locations or record title transfers.⁵⁷ The Chinese miners may have had a system of their own by which individuals or companies held claims. Like their Euro-American counterparts, Chinese people in the Leesburg Basin in 1870 were almost exclusively men, with their median age perhaps slightly older than that of the Euro-American population.⁵⁸ Chinese households were about 50% larger than others in the basin, the former averaging 3.4 persons per household and the latter 2.1.⁵⁹ The Chinese personal habits also set them apart from other Leesburg residents. They wore traditional clothing,⁶⁰ worshipped in joss houses, and smoked opium, gambled, and played games for recreation and entertainment. Some moved to Salmon during the winter months when mining was not possible, to be near fellow Chinese living in the town's small Chinatown.⁶¹

During the 1870s, Euro-American placer miners slowly deserted Leesburg, several acquiring ranches in the Salmon and Lemhi river valleys, so that by 1875 most of the valley bottoms in Lemhi County had been claimed.⁶² Those who remained in the mining town perhaps could not hope to make the return on their claims or the wages that were paid in the previous decade, but the prices of food, supplies, and housing were

reasonable and life more settled. In fact, the miners may have been too "settled," as some have described their lives as "monotonous and colorless."⁶³ Small placer mining companies owned by local residents were apparently still the rule; lode mine development by outside investors did not affect the labor pool until later in the nineteenth century.

The Leesburg post office was discontinued for about 20 months in the late 1870s,⁶⁴ suggesting that the population had dropped significantly during the decade. The 1880 census gives no clear indication of that; the Leesburg figures were combined with others in the 20th (Salmon City) District, and the town's residents cannot be separated from the larger group.⁶⁵

The social and economic history of Leesburg for the 1880s and 1890s is difficult to reconstruct because of the lack of primary data. One assumes that this was the time when the pattern of life at Leesburg which continued throughout the historic period was established. This pattern included steady employment for a small group of miners on their own claims, occasional excitement as new investors took over lode or placer mining properties and planned development, and a limited number of goods and services provided at Leesburg.

There are several examples of steady employment for a handful of miners and laborers during the late nineteenth century. David McNutt's hired crew operated his hydraulic mining plant on Moose Creek until he sold out to the Pacific Dredging Company in 1898.⁶⁶ The Richardson placers on Napias Creek were mined almost continuously from initial discovery in the 1860s until about 1910.⁶⁷ The Italian Mine, a lode mine located up Arnett Creek, was a producer from the early 1890s to about 1920.⁶⁸ Also on Arnett Creek, the Hockensmith/Goff placers were mined by hydraulic giants from 1878 into the late 1930s.⁶⁹

The excitement of new money in the district during the late nineteenth century centered around a handful of lode mines, including the Italian, Haidee, Gold Dust, and Gold Ridge mines. Local residents rarely owned the mines, but instead provided the labor needed for mine development and operation. Work was often sporadic, with the number of workers employed fluctuating from year to year as improvements were being made, working capital became scarce, new mining techniques were tested for effectiveness, and the like. At the turn of the century, daily wages were low, \$3 per day, but sufficient.⁷⁰ Archaeological evidence suggests that laborers for larger mining companies were provided with or had the opportunity to purchase a wider range of food products than did miners working independently or for smaller companies, suggesting a slightly higher standard of living for the former.⁷¹

Leesburg from 1900 to World War II

One source has suggested that there was a period of renewed interest in Leesburg at the turn of the century, based on the number of buildings of that age which still stand.⁷² The suggestion seems to be supported by newspaper accounts dating to the early 1900s and other records of mining and community development. These data document production at the Italian Mine, installation of the Moose Creek dredge, and developments at the Gold Dust and Gold Ridge mines, and new construction and extensive remodeling in the Leesburg townsite.⁷³

The 1900 census listed 157 residents in the district with the proportion of Chinese to Euro-American inhabitants (31:126) not much different than it was 30 years previous. Women, all married and living with their husbands, and children comprised 16% of the area's population, significantly more than had been reported earlier for the Leesburg district.⁷⁴ Census records document the aging of the Leesburg population, with Chinese residents averaging 54 or more years old in 1900, almost 20 years older than what was recorded 30 years previous. The average age of Euro-American residents was also greater in 1900 than it was in 1870, 38 years instead of 30.⁷⁵

The listing of two teachers in the 1900 census records for the district suggests that school was held in Leesburg, apparently reinstituted after the first school was closed in the 1870s.

Social activities in the basin were simple, suited to the small population and absence of commercial entertainment. Group recreation included dances, ski-jumping, sledding, cards and other games, drinking, and, when it became available, listening to the radio.⁷⁶

The life of one Leesburg resident, who moved to the basin in 1906 and remained for more than 30 years, is instructive. Crist Stucky first worked for a placer mining company about 4 miles south of town, but soon left to form a partnership with two other men. On Arnett Creek, the men developed a hydraulic mining site. Stucky's partners became disillusioned with the return on their small investment, and left the claim to Stucky where he remained for years. The ingenuity which Stucky used to eke a living from his claim is likely typical for small-time miners of the era. His cabin was made from logs cut locally. Food was bought locally or in Salmon, but was supplemented by wild game that he hunted. He fashioned a make-shift hydroelectric turbine from a Model-T wheel which he used to generate electricity to light his log cabin.⁷⁷

The census figures for the Leesburg district for 1910 indicate a sharp decrease in total population with less than half the number of residents reported for 1900. The

number of Chinese inhabitants dropped by 90% (from 31 to 3). Historic documents offer no obvious explanation for the decline among the Chinese.

As the lode mines failed to produce, despite a fair amount of development work, interest in Leesburg again waned and by 1920 the population had dropped to only 29. The number of year-round residents stabilized at this figure for the following 20 years. Renewed efforts by outside investors to mine Leesburg's placer deposits began in 1920 and continued to World War II, but they did little to change the hasin's population size or composition.

Leesburg continued to be served by a stage into the 1930s, although freight was first trucked into the basin in 1919.⁷⁸ By the 1930s, no commercial businesses remained in town, but the post office was still open and a schoolhouse was built in 1935.⁷⁹ By the time the post office closed in September, 1942, mining had ceased for the duration of World War II and only a handful of people stayed in town year-round.⁸⁰

FUTURE OF THE PROPERTY

A portion of the Leesburg Mining District lies within the impact area of a large open-pit mining operation proposed by Meridian Gold Company and known as the Beartrack Gold Project. Specific locations will be damaged by various mining features such as mine pits, waste rock dumps, and heap leach pads. Until last winter, Meridian was prepared to begin construction of the Beartrack facility in 1993, but has recently placed the project on-hold.

Several sites within the Leesburg Mining District are listed or have been determined eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. They include the Bonanza Hydraulic Mining Site; the Gold Dust Mine, Mill, and Camp; and the Leesburg Townsite, which have been documented as HAER No. ID-23, HAER No. ID-24, and HABS No. 106, respectively. As specified by a Memorandum of Agreement signed on August 2, 1991, this HAER document has been prepared as mitigation for damage to the Leesburg Mining District.

ENDNOTES

1. The historical background of the Leesburg Basin is quoted directly from: Robert R. Kautz, Dan Scurlock, and Amy C. Earls, "Research Design and Methods," in "Cultural Resources Investigations of Leesburg and Vicinity, Lemhi County, Idaho: Draft," (Austin, Texas, and Reno, Nevada: Mariah Associates, 1992), 10-37. Some sections of the original document have been excluded, specifically, all discussion of activities in the Leesburg vicinity which preceded the discovery of gold and lengthy quotations of contemporary newspaper accounts. Brackets mark places in the text where this author has inserted explanatory text. References cited in the Kautz, Scurlock, and Earls' report have been converted to the references style used elsewhere in this HAER document.
2. George E. Shoup, History of Lemhi County, (Salmon: Salmon Recorder Herald, 1940, reprint Boise: Idaho State Library, 1969, page numbers refer to reprint edition), 5.
3. A. Dudley Gardner, "Cultural Setting," in "A Cultural Resources Inventory of the Meridian Gold Company Beartrack Project, Lemhi County, Idaho," by Michael R. Polk, (Ogden, Utah: Sagebrush Archaeological Consultants, 1991), 17-19; Shoup, History of Lemhi County, 5; Idaho Bureau of Mines and Geology, "Gold Camps and Silver Cities," 2d ed., by Merle W. Wells, Idaho Bureau of Mines and Geology Bulletin 22 (Moscow: Idaho Bureau of Mines and Geology, 1983), 67-68.
4. Idaho Historical Society, "Mining in Idaho," Idaho Historical Society Reference Series 9 (Boise: Idaho Historical Society, 1969).
5. Wells, "Gold Camps," 68. See Idaho Bureau of Mines and Geology.
6. A.C., "Grantsville (Leesburg)," Montana Post, 29 December 1866, 7.
7. Gardner, "Cultural Setting," 20-23; Wells, "Gold Camps," 69. See Idaho Bureau of Mines and Geology.
8. "From Salmon," Montana Post, 11 May 1867, 7.
9. Wells, "Gold Camps," 70-71. See Idaho Bureau of Mines and Geology.
10. Orion E. Kirkpatrick, History of the Leesburg Pioneers, (Salt Lake City: Pyramid Press, 1934), 69-70; Murdoch M. McPherson, "Recollections," Salmon Public Library, Salmon, n.d., 31.

11. Shoup, History of Lemhi County, 11; Wells, "Gold Camps," 71-72. See Idaho Bureau of Mines and Geology.
12. Ibid.
13. Gardner, "Cultural Setting," 23-24; Shoup, History of Lemhi County, 7.
14. Gardner, History of Lemhi County, 18; Wells, "Gold Camps," 71. See Idaho Bureau of Mines and Geology.
15. Gardner, "Cultural Setting," 25-30; U.S Bureau of the Census, Department of Commerce and Labor, "20th District, Lemhi County, Tenth U.S. Census," (Washington: Department of Commerce and Labor, 1880).
16. Gardner, "Cultural Setting," 31-36. [Gardner, citing the Engineering and Mining Journal (13 January 1917, 95-96; 19 November 1898), mentions both 1896 and 1898 as start-up dates for the Moose Creek dredge, while S.H. Lorain and O.H. Metzger report an 1899 date; U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Mines, "Reconnaissance of Placer Mining Districts in Lemhi County, Idaho," U.S. Bureau of Mines Information Circular 7082 (1939), 57. Also, the Engineering and Mining Journal (10 March 1928, 429) reported that \$1 million had been produced at the Moose Creek placer by hydraulicking in the late nineteenth century and only \$½ million by dredging.]
17. Gardner, "Cultural Setting," 33, 36-38; O.E. Kirkpatrick, "A Brief Story of My Life," Snake River Echoes vol. 8, no. 1 (1979), 3-4.
18. U.S. Department of the Interior, Geological Survey, "Geology and Ore Deposits of Lemhi County, Idaho," by Joseph B. Umpleby, U.S. Geological Survey Bulletin 528 (Washington, D.C.: Geological Survey, 1913), 148.
19. Idaho Bureau of Mines and Geology, "Reconnaissance Geology of the Leesburg Quadrangle, Lemhi County, Idaho," by Philip N. Shockey, Idaho Bureau of Mines and Geology Pamphlet 113 (Moscow: Idaho Bureau of Mines and Geology, 1957), 33-37.
20. Gardner, "Cultural Setting," 34; Umpleby, "Ore Deposits of Lemhi County," 146. See U.S. Department of the Interior.
21. Kautz, "Research Design and Methods," Figures 2.1-2.5; Gardner, "Cultural Setting."

22. Gardner, "Cultural Setting," 38-41; U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service, Salmon National Forest, "Cultural Resource Inventory of the Leesburg National Historic District, CRM-SL-249," by Mitzi Rossillon, on file, Salmon National Forest Supervisor's Office, Salmon, 1982, 2.

23. This is the conclusion of the historical information taken directly from Kautz, "Research Design and Methods." The final paragraphs of this section have been prepared by the author.

24. Shockey, "Geology of the Leesburg Quadrangle," 37. See Idaho Bureau of Mines and Geology; Wells, "Gold Camps," 14-15. See Idaho Bureau of Mines and Geology; Idaho Bureau of Mines and Geology, "Rush to Idaho," by Merle W. Wells, Idaho Bureau of Mines and Geology Bulletin 19 (Moscow: Idaho Bureau of Mines and Geology, 1961); Muriel S. Wolle, The Bonanza Trail, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1953), 228; Idaho Bureau of Mines and Geology, "Geology and Gold Resources of North Central Idaho," by Francis A. Thomson and Samuel M. Ballard, Idaho Bureau of Mines and Geology Bulletin 7 (Moscow: Idaho Bureau of Mines and Geology, 1924), 58.

25. Wells, "Rush to Idaho," 3-6; Thomson and Ballard, "Gold Resources of North Central Idaho," 112. See Idaho Bureau of Mines and Geology.

26. Kirkpatrick, Leesburg Pioneers, 103, 121; Wells, "Gold Camps," 72. See Idaho Bureau of Mines and Geology.

27. Kirkpatrick, Leesburg Pioneers, 53, 70, 74, 78, 137, 162; Lorain and Metzger, "Placer-Mining Districts in Lemhi County," 49-50. See U.S. Department of the Interior; Robert S. Lewis, Elements of Mining, 3d ed., (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1964), 390.

28. Bannock Post, 9 February 1867, 2, cited in Gardner, "Cultural Overview," 20; Brian Shovers and Lynn Fredlund, "Cultural Resources Inventory and Evaluation: Beartrack Prospect, Leesburg, Idaho," (Butte, Montana: GCM Services, Inc., 1989), 4; The (Salmon) Idaho Recorder, 26 March 1890, 3; Kirkpatrick, Leesburg Pioneers, 134, 144; Dan Scurlock and others, "Economic Context," in "Cultural Resources Investigations of Leesburg and Vicinity, Lemhi County, Idaho: Draft," (Austin, Texas, and Reno, Nevada: Mariah Associates, 1992), 255.

29. Wells, "Gold Camps," 5. See Idaho Bureau of Mines and Geology.

30. Kirkpatrick, Leesburg Pioneers, 74-75; Kirkpatrick, cited in Lorain and Metzger, "Placer-Mining Districts in Lemhi County," 57. See U.S. Department of the Interior.

31. "Lode and Placer Mining in Lemhi County, Idaho, to Expand," Engineering and Mining Journal, 10 March 1928, 429.
32. Engineering and Mining Journal, 19 November 1898, 617.
33. Umpleby, "Ore Deposits of Lemhi County," 149. See U.S. Department of the Interior; Lorain and Metzger, "Placer-Mining Districts in Lemhi County," 57; Gardner, "Cultural Overview," 34-36. See U.S. Department of the Interior; Correspondence from S.H. Brockunier to the E&MJ, Engineering and Mining Journal, 20 May 1902; Idaho Bureau of Mines and Geology, Inspector of Mines, Forty-second Annual Report of the Mining Industry of Idaho for the Year 1940, by Arthur Campbell, (Boise: Inspector of Mines, 1941), 166; Engineering and Mining Journal, 10 March 1928, 429.
34. Lorain and Metzger, "Placer-Mining Districts in Lemhi County," 41. See U.S. Department of the Interior.
35. Mitzi Rossillon, "Bonanza Hydraulic Mining Site," Historic American Engineering Record No. ID-23, on file, San Francisco, National Park Service, 1992; Lorain and Metzger, "Placer-Mining Districts in Lemhi County," 47. See U.S. Department of the Interior.
36. See for example, Lorain and Metzger, "Placer-Mining Districts in Lemhi County," 50-51, 57. See U.S. Department of the Interior.
37. U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Mines, "Small-Scale Placer Mines as a Source of Gold, Employment, and Livelihood in 1935," by Charles W. Merrill, Charles W. Henderson, and O.E. Kiessling, "U.S. Bureau of Mines Mineral Technology and Output per Man Studies Report" E-2, (Philadelphia: U.S. Bureau of Mines, 1937), 7.
38. Dick Shoup, Interview by Mitzi Rossillon, September 1982, Interview #11, Salmon National Forest Supervisor's Office, Salmon.
39. Kirkpatrick (Leesburg Pioneers, 147) has written that A.A. Mayfield's location of the Pioneer Mine, in the late 1860s, was the first lode claim in Leesburg Basin. However, Umpleby ("Ore Deposits of Lemhi County," 146; see U.S. Department of the Interior) claimed that the Shoo Fly mine in the Moose Creek drainage, located in 1870, was the first.
40. Gardner, "Cultural Overview," 31-33.
41. Umpleby, "Ore Deposits of Lemhi County," 152-155.

42. Shockey, "Geology of the Leesburg Quadrangle," 32. See Idaho Bureau of Mines and Geology.

43. Umpleby, "Ore Deposits of Lemhi County," 153, 154. See U.S. Department of the Interior; Shockey, "Geology of the Leesburg Quadrangle," 32. See Idaho Bureau of Mines and Geology.

44. Scurlock, "Economic Context," 253; Shoup, History of Lemhi County, 5.

45. Scurlock, "Economic Context," 262.

46. Wells, "Gold Camps," 70. See Idaho Bureau of Mines and Geology; Scurlock, "Economic Context," 262-263.

47. Dick Shoup, Interview by Mitzi Rossillon, Summer 1982, unrecorded.

48. Wells, "Gold Camps," 68-69. See Idaho Bureau of Mines and Geology.

49. Ibid.

50. Shoup, History of Lemhi County, 6; Gardner, "Cultural Overview," 19-20.

51. Scurlock, "Economic Context," 259-260.

52. Ibid.

53. Wells, "Gold Camps," 68. See Idaho Bureau of Mines and Geology.

54. Dan Scurlock, Amy Earls, and Jason D. Marmor, "Socio-Political Organization," in "Cultural Resources Investigations of Leesburg and Vicinity, Lemhi County, Idaho: Draft," (Austin, Texas, and Reno, Nevada: Mariah Associates, 1992), 339-341.

55. Ibid., 344.

56. Ibid., 342, 344.

57. Gardner, "Cultural Context," 28.

58. Dan Scurlock, Susan Perlman, and Amy Earls, "Demographics," in "Cultural Resources Investigations of Leesburg and Vicinity, Lemhi County, Idaho: Draft," (Austin, Texas, and Reno, Nevada: Mariah Associates, 1992), 389.

59. Michael R. Polk, "A Cultural Resources Inventory of the Meridian Gold Company Beartrack Project, Lemhi County, Idaho," (Ogden, Utah: Sagebrush Archaeological Consultants, 1991), 76.
60. Scurlock, "Socio-Political Organization," 347.
61. Shoup, History of Lemhi County, 9.
62. Ibid., 15.
63. E. Lord, Comstock Mining and Miners, (1883, reprint San Diego: Howell North Books, 1980), cited by Gardner, "Cultural Overview," 27.
64. Scurlock, "Socio-Political Organization," 342.
65. Polk, "Inventory of the Meridian Gold Company Beartrack Project," 71.
66. Kirkpatrick, Leesburg Pioneers, 106.
67. Ibid., 91-92; Dick Shoup, Interview by Mitzi Rossillon, 19 August 1982, Interview #10, Salmon National Forest Supervisor's Office, Salmon.
68. Gardner, "Cultural Overview," 32; U.S. Department of the Interior, Geological Survey, Mineral Resources of the United States, (Washington: Geological Survey, 1921 and 1922).
69. Kirkpatrick, Leesburg Pioneers, 74-75; Lorain and Metzger, "Placer-Mining Districts of Lemhi County," 46. See U.S. Department of the Interior.
70. Scurlock, "Economic Context," 256.
71. Ibid., 288.
72. Rossillon, "Leesburg National Historic District," 15.
73. Umpleby, "Ore Deposits of Lemhi County." See U.S. Department of the Interior; The Salmon Idaho Recorder, 1903-1906 (see, for example, "The Gold Dust," 6 March 1903; "The Big Strike At Leesburg," 27 March 1903; Leesburg Locals," 28 August 1903 and 4 and 11 September 1903; "Arnett Creek Mines," 1 September 1904; "The Gold Ridge Mine," 15 November 1906).
74. Scurlock, "Demographics," 393, 395
75. Polk, "Inventory of the Meridian Gold Company Beartrack Project," 75.

76. Scurlock, "Socio-Political Organization," 343, 351.

77. Lorain and Metzger, "Placer-Mining Districts in Lemhi County," 46. See U.S. Department of the Interior; Kahne Jensen, "Crist's Cabin," Patchwork (1990), cited in Scurlock, "Socio-Political Organization," 350.

78. Scurlock, "Economic Context," 263; Scurlock, "Socio-Political Organization," 351.

79. Paul Fitzgerald, Interview by Mitzi Rossillon, 1 September 1982, Interview #12, Salmon National Forest Supervisor's Office, Salmon.

80. Scurlock, "Socio-Political Organization," 342; Fitzgerald, Interview.

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